

POLS 3322-600: Early Modern Political Theory

Texas A&M University–San Antonio

Fall 2026

Time: Asynchronous

Location: OLC

Instructor:

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CAB 351-B

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Course Description

Theories of the major thinkers and the related intellectual and political movements.

Course Information

Is political freedom about doing what you want, sharing power, or actively participating in political life? Is freedom an inherently individual practice or a necessarily collective one? Is it a personal or public matter? What secures freedom and what erodes it? What is the relationship of political freedom to power, equality, community, and identity? What government is and how it is practiced relies on a whole host of assumptions, some of which must be clearly agreed upon at the outset. For instance, how groups will organize themselves – will they have representatives or not? How will those representatives be elected? How will they decide policy? How will they enforce it? etc. – requires consent to legitimate governing bodies. Answers to such questions as “What is justice? (Or freedom? Or equality?)” “Who is a good citizen and why?” “What is a good state?” and “What should my obligations be?” remain under continual debate, even as they paradoxically determine much of the world we live in and share with others. This course is an introduction to early modern political theory and the field of study that helps us develop working answers to those more contentious questions surrounding the ways in which we live our political and social lives.

Course Meetings

As this is an asynchronous course, there will be no mandatory scheduled meeting times. **THIS COURSE WILL BE A SELF-PACED PROGRAM.** This means that you will be given assignments at the beginning of the week that you complete on your own schedule before the due dates at the end of the week. I highly encourage the use of my weekly office hours if you are interested in a Q&A or a general discussion of the weekly topics and/or assignments.

Office Hours

Time: Monday/Wednesday 11:00 am – 12:30 pm or by appointment.

[Schedule Office Hours meeting](#)

I will be holding office hours via Microsoft Teams every Monday and Wednesday from 11 am to 12:30 pm. You are highly encouraged to make use of my office hours throughout the semester to discuss any ideas you have—big or small—pertaining to this course or your general course of study. If you cannot make the designated time, email me to set up an appointment that works with your schedule. Click the link above to schedule a meeting.

Student Learning Objectives

After completing POLS 3322 students will be able to do the following:

SLO 1 | analyze and evaluate foundational texts in modern political theory, identify central arguments and underlying assumptions, and assess their relevance to contemporary political and ethical issues (Critical Thinking).

SLO 2 | effectively communicate complex interpretations of modern political theory in clear, well-organized writing that uses appropriate academic conventions and textual evidence from primary sources (Effective Communication).

SLO 3 | articulate how political theories relate to their own beliefs, ethical frameworks, and decision-making processes as a member of a political community (Personal Responsibility).

SLO 4 | explain how modern political thinkers understood justice, power, and civic engagement, and assess how those ideas can inform responsible participation in modern democratic societies (Social Responsibility).

Grading

Your grade rests on your classroom engagement across the semester, portfolio checks, writing assignments, writing assessments, and a Capstone Portfolio. To receive full credit for the course, your participation must be made and your work submitted by the stated deadlines. Late work will only be accepted for Portfolio Checks, with 15% being taken off for the first day and an additional 15% for the second. Portfolio Checks will not be accepted more than 48 hours after the original deadline. No late or makeup submissions will be accepted for any other assignments.

Submissions with vague and generic language that omit the specific issues/questions raised in the assignment prompt and class lectures will get a maximum grade of 49%. Submissions generated by an LLM/AI will receive a 0% and referred to the university for academic misconduct (this includes Grammarly and similar software; there is grammar editing software available in BB and MS Word).

Grade breakdown:

20% Writing Assignments

15% Self-Assessments

20% Peer-Assessments

5% Portfolio Checks

40% Capstone Portfolio

Course Policies

- **BlackBoard:** I will use BlackBoard for class announcements and course updates; students are expected to check BlackBoard and their A&M-SA email regularly. It is the student's responsibility to ensure they have regular BlackBoard and email access.
- **Readings:** All assigned materials and required reading are integral to your success in this course and must be completed in their entirety. Details and nuance matter in political thought, and the details are in the text.

Graded Assignments

- **Positional Essays** | Due no later than 11:59 pm on the posted deadline. Approximately 750 words in length and must address each topic/item in the assignment prompt to be considered for full credit. Essays are graded Complete/Incomplete: a Complete is registered as 75% or better on the assignment; this requires thoughtful engagement with the assigned text and a clear, defensible position, submitted on time. These are not polished final

products but working drafts meant to be critiqued and discussed. Three of your essays, substantially revised, will become your Capstone Portfolio. The true value of these essays is the feedback you receive from your peers, me, and your self-assessments during the semester. An essay posted late may still be read for feedback but will not count toward your Complete/Incomplete total for that week.

- **Self-Assessments** | Following Writing Assignments, you will conduct a Self-Assessment review of your work. This is an opportunity to develop your writing and communication skills, and to recognize your strengths and areas for improvement. Follow the detailed instructions in the Self-Assessment Guidelines closely.
- **Peer-Assessments** | Following Writing Assignments, you will conduct a peer assessment of two of your classmates' work. The peer-assessment process is an opportunity to provide feedback to classmates on their written communication by assisting them in identifying writing strengths as well as areas for development. Follow the detailed instructions in the Peer-Assessment Guidelines closely.
- **Capstone Portfolio (40%)** | To be eligible for the Capstone Portfolio, you must receive "Complete" on at least 5 of the 6 writing assignments. Your final grade rests heavily on a portfolio submitted at the end of the semester. You will select your three strongest weekly essays, revise and expand each one incorporating the peer and instructor feedback you received over the semester. There is no separate final exam. Follow the detailed instructions in the Capstone Portfolio Guidelines closely.

Required Books:

If you opted into the ACCESS program registering for the class, the required e-textbook will be available in BlackBoard. If you *did not opt into the ACCESS program*, acquire your books early in the semester. Students with access to a credit/debit card can obtain the book online. Alternate editions/versions/formats are permissible for this course. *Email me if you have any questions.*

Political Thought, Michael Rosen and Jonathan Wolff (Eds.), Oxford University Press, ISBN: 9780192892782 / ISBN-13: 978-0192892782

Course Schedule and Readings

Week 1 (August 24 – 30): Course introduction and overview

- Read the syllabus thoroughly and familiarize yourself with the course in BlackBoard.
- Review Peer and Self-Assessment Guidelines, Capstone Portfolio Guidelines, and Writing Assignment grading rubric.
- Watch *Why Study Political Philosophy?* clip (located in Course Content folder).

Week 2 (Aug 31 – Sep 6): Authorship and Ownership

- Reading Assignment:
 - o Foucault, "What is an Author" (handout)
 - o Barthes, "Death of the Author" (handout).
- Positional Essay 1 due Sunday, Sep 6

Week 3 (Sep 7 – Sep 13): Human Nature

- Reading Assignment:
 - o *Political Thought*, "Introduction,"
 - o *Political Thought*, Section I Introduction, pp. 11-17, 20-22, 37-43.

- Self-Assessment 1 due Sunday, Sep 13
- Peer-Assessments 1 due Sunday, Sep 13

Week 4 (Sep 14 – Sep 20): Justification of the State

- Reading Assignment: *Political Thought*, pp. 52-54, 56-65.
- Portfolio Check 1 due Sunday
- Positional Essay 2 due Sunday, Sep 20

Week 5 (Sep 21 – Sep 27): The Role of Civil Obedience

- Reading Assignment:
 - o *Political Thought*, pp. 66-70, 78-88.
- Self-Assessment 2 due Sunday, Sep 27
- Peer-Assessments 2 due Sunday, Sep 27

Week 6 (Sep 28 – Oct 4): The Democratic Ideal

- Reading Assignment:
 - o *Political Thought*, pp. 89-90, 96-102, 107-110, 115-116.
- Positional Essay 3 due Sunday, Oct 4

Week 7 (Oct 5 – Oct 11): Liberty and Rights

- Reading Assignment:
 - o *Political Thought*, pp. 119-121, 124-127, 133, 142-144, 156-159, 172-175.
- Self-Assessment 3 due Sunday, Oct 11
- Peer-Assessments 3 due Sunday, Oct 11

Week 8 (Oct 12 – Oct 18): Private Property and Distributive Justice

- Reading assignment:
 - o *Political Thought*, pp. 187-194, 202-206, 229-232.
- Positional Essay 4 due Sunday, Oct 18

Week 9 (Oct 19 – Oct 25):

- Reading Assignment: none
- Portfolio Check 2 due Sunday
- Self-Assessment 4 due Sunday, Oct 25
- Peer-Assessments 4 due Sunday, Oct 25

Week 10 (Oct 26 – Nov 1): Justice

- Reading Assignment:
 - o *Political Thought*, pp. 256-269.
- Positional Essay 5 due Sunday, Nov 1

Week 11 (Nov 2 – Nov 8): Minority Rights

- Reading Assignment:
 - o *Political Thought*, Sections VI.c. – VI.e.
- Self-Assessment 5 due Sunday, Nov 8
- Peer-Assessments 5 due Sunday, Nov 8

Week 12 (Nov 9 – Nov 15): Conservatism

- Reading Assignment:
 - o *Political Thought*, pp. 319-334.
- Positional Essay 6 due Sunday, Nov 15

Week 13 (Nov 16 – Nov 22): Communitarianism and Socialism

- Reading Assignment:
 - o *Political Thought*, pp. 335-358.
- Portfolio Check 3 due Sunday
- Self-Assessment 6 due Sunday, Nov 22
- Peer-Assessments 6 due Sunday, Nov 22

Week 14 (Nov 23 – 29): NO CLASS | THANKSGIVING BREAK

- No assignments due

Week 15 (Nov 30 – Dec 6): Last Week of Classes

- Work on Capstone Portfolio

Week 16 (Dec 7 – Dec 13): Finals Week

- Work on Capstone Portfolio

CAPSTONE PORTFOLIO DUE NO LATER THAN DEC 9th @ 11:59 PM